NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
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CHARLES WEISS/JERUSALEM

THE UNREST IN IRAN

ANNCR:

THE ANTI-SHAH, ANTI-GOVERNMENT UNREST WHICH HAS BEEN PLAGUING IRAN FOR NEARLY A YEAR NOW, SEEMS TO BE GETTING WORSE. INCIDENTS IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF TEHERAN AND PROVINCIAL TOWNS ARE REPORTED ALMOST DAILY. VOA MIDEAST CORRESPONDENT CHARLES WEISS SENT THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

MOST OF THE VIOLENCE HAS BEEN CONCENTRATED IN OUTLYING TOWNS, BUT EVEN TEHERAN AND THE HOLY CITY OF QOM SOUTH OF THE CAPITAL HAVE REPORTED DISTURBANCES IN THE PAST FEW DAYS. SO FAR THE CLASHES BETWEEN DEMONSTRATORS AND UNIFORMED AUTHORITIES, WHETHER POLICE OR ARMY, HAVE BEEN MORE SKIRMISHES THAN PITCHED BATTLES. WHAT GIVES OBSERVERS IN TEHERAN THE MOST CAUSE FOR CONCERN IS THE FACT THEY BEGAN JUST AS THE AUTHORITARIAN RULE OF THE PAST DECADE SHOWED SIGNS OF RELENTING. MORE FREEDOM SEEMS ONLY TO PROVOKE MORE VIOLENCE, THEY SAY.

THE GOVERNMENT OF JAAFER SHARIF-EMAMI HAS TRIED BOTH THE CARROT AND THE STICK TO RESTORE ORDER. BUT NEITHER HAS WORKED. IN RESPONSE TO COMPLAINTS BY THE DOMINANT RELIGIOUS SECT IN IRAN, THE SHIITES, HE CLOSED DOWN PORNOGRAPHIC BOOK SHOPS AND MOVIE HOUSES AND BANNED GAMBLING. THEN HE LASHED OUT AT EMBEZZLEMENT IN HIGH PLACES, THOUGH HERE HIS TRACK RECORD (PERFORMANCE) HAS BEEN SPOTTY, AND FAVORITISM IS ALLEGED IN THE REALLY FLAGRANT CASES. BUT EVEN BEFORE MISTER SHARIF-EMAMI CAME TO POWER IN AUGUST, THE SHAH HAD LIFTED THE BAN ON POLITICAL PARTIES, RELAXED PRESS CENSORSHIP AND SCHEDULED FREE AND GENERAL ELECTIONS FOR NEXT JUNE. THIS WAS THE CARROT.

AT THE SAME IME THE NEW PRIME MINISTER TRIED TO INTIMIDATE THE OPPOSITION WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF MARTIAL LAW IN TWELVE OF THE MAJOR CITIES, AND HE IS HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR ONE MAJOR BLOODLETTING ON THE DAY THE DECREE WENT INTO EFFECT, SEPTEMBER EIGHTH. THAT WAS THE DAY SEVERAL SCORE THOUSAND PEOPLE DISREGARDED SOLDIERS' WARNINGS IN JALEH SQUARE IN DOWNTOWN TEHERAN, AND THE TROOPS FIRED INTO THE CROWD. AT LEAST ONE HUNDRED TWENTY DEMONSTRATORS WERE KILLED, THOUGH THE EXACT FIGURE WILL PROBABLY NEVER BE KNOWN. IN THE NEARLY TWO MONTHS SINCE, AN ESTIMATED FIFTY PEOPLE HAVE DIED IN STREET VIOLENCE AS THE TROOPS MADE IT CLEAR THEY WOULD NOT BROOK VANDALISM AND WHAT HAS BECOME KNOWN AS MOBOCRACY. THIS WAS THE STICK.

RELENTLESSLY STIRRING UP OPPOSITION THROUGH ALL THIS IS THE EXILED SHIITE SAGE, AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI. FROM HIS TIGHTLY GUARDED SUBURBAN RESIDENCE NEAR PARIS WHERE HE'S LIVED SINCE BEING DEPORTED FROM IRAQ EARLIER THIS MONTH, HE PERIODICALLY ISSUES CALLS FOR THE DEPOSAL OF THE SHAH AND THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY'S REPLACEMENT BY A REGIME SELECTED BY THE MOSLEM PEOPLE OF IRAN.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS LABELED ITS OPPONENTS ISLAMIC MARXISTS AND INSINUATED THAT MOSLEM UNREST IS BEING FANNED BY SOVIET-BACKED AGITATORS. AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI DISMISSES THE COMMUNIST THREAT. IN A RECENT INTERVIEW, HE SAID THAT THE YOUNG IRANIANS WHO AT PRESENT PROFESS MARXIST LEANINGS WILL ENTHUSIASTICALLY SUPPORT THE ISLAMIC GOVERNMENT OF THE FUTURE.

MEANWHILE, NEARLY ONE MILLION CIVIL SERVANTS HAVE BEEN OUT ON STRIKE FOR THE PAST MONTH. WHILE THEIR COMPLAINT IS A SIMPLE ONE -- THEY WANT A SHARE OF IRAN'S OIL WEALTH THAT WILL ENABLE THEM TO LIVE DECENTLY -- THE STRIKES AND THE DISRUPTIONS THEY CAUSE INEVITABLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENERAL SENSE OF UNEASE.

THERE ARE PERSISTENT REPORTS THAT THE MILITARY HAS DRAWN UP PLANS TO TAKE OVER THE REINS OF GOVERNMENT IF THINGS DON'T QUIET DOWN. INFORMED SOURCES IN TEHERAN EVEN SAID A TAKEOVER HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR LAST WEEK BUT WAS UNEXPLAINABLY POSTPONED FOR THE TIME BEING.

JUST AS SO MANY OTHER ASPECTS OF THE IRANIAN SITUATION ARE DETERMINED BY THE MOSLEM SHIITE CALENDAR, INFORMED QUARTERS FEEL IT MAY ALSO PICK THE TIME OF THE FINAL CRUNCH. THEY MENTION THE TENTH DAY OF THE MOSLEM MONTH OF MUHARREM WHICH THIS YEAR FALLS ON DECEMBER TENTH AS A TRADITIONAL DAY OF ATONEMENT FOR THE SHIITES WHICH CAN BE EXPLOITED FOR OTHER ENDS. FORMALLY IT MARKS THE MOURNING FOR THE GRANDSON OF MOHAMMED HUSSEIN WHO WAS MURDERED BY ASSASSINS IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY. ORTHODOX SHIITES OBSERVE IT WITH SELF-FLAGELLATION, FASTING AND PRAYER, AND OBSERVERS POINT OUT IT, IS A TIME WHEN THEY CAN BE EASILY SWAYED BY INFLAMMATORY SERMONS.

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